

**WAR ISSUES
FOR IRISHMEN:
AN OPEN LETTER TO
COL. ARTHUR LYNCH
FROM BERNARD SHAW**

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MAUNSEL & COMPANY LIMITED
DUBLIN AND LONDON. 1918

A WORD GOING TO PRESS

In war, when events move in earnest, they move so much faster than the brains of the fastest thinker or the pen of the fastest writer that every really well considered utterance arrives the day after the fact. They have certainly moved with a vengeance since conscription was threatened in Ireland. That threat was made in a moment of panic so acute that the British Government actually announced that it was abandoning the English harvest, and tearing its necessary cultivators from the fields regardless of consequences, to meet the military emergency created by the rout of the Fifth Army. Compared to this desperate and suicidal demand on the English nation the demand for conscription in Ireland was moderate and pardonable. Any special bitterness on our side concerning it seems to me to be inhuman. Both demands were, from the military point of view, insane: neither of them could have operated in time to save the situation. Both had to be dropped rather shamefacedly when

the scare subsided. But they shew how appallingly close to the brink of utter defeat the Government believed us then to be.

That was only a few moments ago as moments are counted in this war. Yet as I write these last few hurried words before going to press the German Empire is in the dust; the Austro-Hungarian Empire is changed, as if by an enchanter's wand, into three Republics and a Revolution; the Ottoman Empire is suing for mercy on its knees; and the fact that Bulgaria is out of the war and, with Roumania, declared a Republic, is hardly worth noticing in the general political metamorphosis. The difficulty now is to persuade the Allied nations that the war is not yet over, and that the European chaos, though a necessary accompaniment of a huge transition from what we in Ireland call Castle rule to popular rule, is for the moment a danger that calls, even more urgently than the mere struggle to avoid defeat of the last four years, for the resolute unification and military organization of western democracy. That the Hohenzollern and Hapsburg empires have fallen may fitly be received here with exultant cheers. But if you go deeper and put it that the whole centre of Europe has fallen to pieces politically, the wise man in the west will look to his arms more anxiously than before.

Still, it is a glorious day for Democracy ; and it is fortunate for us that there are enough Irishmen in the Democratic army, and enough soldiers' widows and orphans in Ireland, to make it impossible for Democracy to turn a cold shoulder to us in the hour of her triumph and say, "No thanks to you Irish." But some of us are still open to that reproach. Out of five hundred thousand farmers and farmers' men in England, two hundred thousand who had never dreamt of soldiering before volunteered for service at the beginning of the war to fight for the ideals which Nationalist Ireland has professed in season and out of season. There are Irishmen who plead that we might have done equally well in proportion to our numbers if the English Ascendancy had let us. I do not like the excuse, because I do not see why we need have let the British Ascendancy hinder us ; and I could tell stories of how some of the first English volunteers were received when they rushed to the colors, which would set Ireland wondering that England ever raised an army at all. But however that may be, the fact remains that we are allowing England to beat us in her contribution to the victory of Democracy, and that America, whose subsidies have kept our Nationalist Party in parliamentary existence for thirty years on the understanding that we

Irish are all born soldiers of freedom, is reminding us that if we are too poor to pay we are not too poor to fight, and asking us pretty emphatically which side we are on. Sinn Féin, replying through the mouth of its Congress the other day that it will "make itself felt at the Peace Conference" (whatever that may be), apparently by some mystical force inherent in doing nothing, has made itself so acutely ridiculous that it had really better elect the ex-Kaiser Grand Master of its Order, and retire with him to Dalkey Island, which he would doubtless prefer to Saint Helena as a jumping-off place for any future operations his enthusiasm for Irish liberty may suggest.

There is still time for more Irishmen to affirm their true allegiance to Democracy. They will find in the following pages no attempt to confuse that allegiance with the false allegiance which is only the bargain of Esau. And I am happy to be able to add that they will find no argument which is weakened, and some which are strengthened, by the astonishing turn which Europe has taken since my letter to Colonel Lynch was penned six weeks ago.

G. B. S.

AYOT ST. LAWRENCE.

10th November, 1918.

WAR ISSUES FOR IRISHMEN:
AN OPEN LETTER TO COLONEL
ARTHUR LYNCH FROM BERNARD SHAW

PARKNASILLA,

September 1918.

DEAR COLONEL LYNCH,

It is extremely difficult to do any effective recruiting by written appeals in Ireland, because the British Government, instead of addressing itself to the practical problem of inducing Irish workers to enlist, seeks rather to justify its own position in the war from the point of view of the governing class, and will be content with nothing less than a demonstration that it is the duty, not only of the Irish, but of all the other nations of the earth, to take up arms in its defence. This is natural enough; and no doubt we Irish would do it ourselves if we were in the same position; but the result is that the goods are not delivered. The reproaches hurled at Irishmen for not rallying to the side which professes to be "making the world safe for Democracy" hit Sweden and Spain and Holland harder than they hit Ireland; for none of these countries have had their nationality and their right to popular govern-

ment denied, as Ireland has, by the British Empire. Accordingly, Ireland, finding herself in highly respectable company with much stronger reasons for neutrality, treats such obviously interested reproaches with derision, and maintains her neutrality.

The appeal to Ireland to ally herself with the French Republic was used by myself and, if I mistake not, by you, early in the war; but as England is not a republic, and in fact sentenced you to death on one occasion for fighting, as a Republican, on behalf of a republic which was at war with her monarch, there was no response in England except from Mr. H. G. Wells. At that moment there was the most urgent need of an Opposition in the House of Commons which could oppose without being suspected of Pacifism. It was obvious that only a Republican Opposition could fulfil that condition. Yet Mr. Wells's suggestion was followed by a dead silence. Under such circumstances it was inevitable that an appeal on Republican grounds on behalf of an alliance in which England was the principal figure should fall flat. Its success would have been regarded in many influential British quarters as a defeat more serious than any that was to be feared from the Central Empires.

The appeal had therefore to be based on the

profession by the Allied Governments of those democratic and nationalist principles which may be supposed to have a binding effect on the political consciences of Irishmen. But was this profession credible in view of the antecedents of the Allied Governments? Loud and unhesitating as the reply in the affirmative is from the suspected parties and their recruiting authorities, I cannot expect any Irishman to be convinced by them. An Empire championing the cause of nationalities is a contradiction in terms; and the British Empire is the one in which the contradiction is grossest. Facts are too much for so absurd a pretension; and Ireland is one of the leading facts in the case. Even the allusions that were made so recklessly to the great fights for liberty at the beginning of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not include any mention of the fact that on those occasions the victorious troops of liberty did not get the liberty they fought for. The enthusiasts who defeated Philip II, Louis XIV, and Napoleon won their victory; but they won nothing else: they returned home—those who did return—to a tyranny as oppressive as that from which they had meant to rescue the world. Common men fight and die for liberty and equality and other inspiring ideals; but it is the actual Governments of the victors

that decide what effect the victory shall have on political institutions. To ask Irishmen to die for freedom is one thing: to ask them to die in order that Lords Curzon and Milner may get the upper hand of the Hohenzollern dynasty is another. It is silly to pretend that the governing classes of Europe can be unanimous in desiring to make the world safe for Democracy. There is something revolting in the democratic professions of politicians whose whole career flatly contradicts the notion that they are fighting to overthrow the social order which they have always defended, and which is in all essentials the same in the Central Empires as in their present enemies. It was evident in 1914 that on most questions which divide the interests of the man of the people, Irish or English, from those of the governing classes, the figureheads of the Allies sympathized with the Kaiser and not with the figureheads of proletarian democracy. It is still evident that their opinions and interests have not changed. They govern in the interests of the country house and the counting house, regarding labor as a source of rent for the one and profit for the other. As between King William Hohenzollern and Mr. Arthur James Balfour, dominated as they both are by the economic interests and social ideas and traditions of their class, there is, from

the point of view of the man who lives by labor, nothing to choose. It is not possible to believe that Mr. Balfour feels otherwise on the Irish question than the Kaiser on the Polish question.

I do not see how recruits can be gained in Ireland by shirking these considerations. They are obvious to all neutral and detached nations; and Ireland is not only neutral and detached, but hostile and critical where England is concerned. Whoever is to recruit effectively in Ireland must put all these cards frankly on the table. The Irish may be persuaded to enlist, or forced into the army as slave soldiers; but they will not be humbugged into enlisting by the rhetoric of British patriotism.

It does not follow, however, that they may not be dissuaded from enlisting, and are not in fact at present being dissuaded from enlisting, by the rhetoric of Irish patriotism, or that this rhetoric is freer from humbug than the British variety. The considerations I have stated above lend themselves very easily to Sinn Féin orators who wish, for one reason or another, to keep Ireland out of the war. But the fact that the official reasons for Irish enlistment will not hold water does not prove that there are no sound reasons to justify the many thousands of Nationalist and Catholic Irishmen who have already enlisted. Sweden, Spain and Holland

may be right to keep out of the war as far as they can; and the United States may have been right in doing the same up to the point at which events proved too strong for that policy, and President Wilson drew the sword at last. That shews that the Irish nation may without dishonor remain neutral. But it does not follow that neutrality is the best policy; and if England would only appeal to Irish interests instead of trying to hypnotize Ireland into a sense of imaginary moral delinquency by claiming a "loyalty" which is regarded as treachery in Ireland, and threatening such an infamy as conscription by Dublin Castle, your recruiting campaign would move more rapidly.

It is a mistake, and in every sense of the word a vulgar one, to suppose that when we have convicted the advocates of a certain opinion of insincerity and hypocrisy, or of motives other than those they allege, we have refuted that opinion. The Christian religion, for instance, does not stand or fall with the good faith of Judas Iscariot, nor Irish Nationalism with that of Leonard McNally and the Irishmen who took the bribes of Pitt to pass the Act of Union. No cause on earth is free from partisans whose motives and character will not bear examination. It is possible to be on the better side, but not possible to be in exclusively good company. Therefore the first thing a

sensible Irishman has to get out of his head is the notion that in choosing sides in the war he can be guided safely by mere reaction against the motives and character of his Allies.

This may seem a hard saying; but the truth is that this war, whatever the intentions of the European Foreign Offices and Courts may have been, has become a war of ideas and institutions, and not a war of dynastic ambitions and capitalistic market hunts. It is true that the sun in heaven is not more conspicuous than the fact that the late Nicholas II had not the faintest intention of making the world safe for Democracy when he mobilized against Austria, and that none of the statesmen in England and France who deliberately sought his alliance instead of that of the United States can be credited with any genuine sympathy with Democracy. But war has a way of taking very little account of the aims of the individuals who plan it. In 1871 nothing was further from the thoughts either of Bismarck or Napoleon III than to give Monarchy its death blow in France and finally establish Republicanism in its place. Bismarck, when he made France pay what he thought a colossal indemnity, certainly did not intend to produce a ruinous financial crash in Berlin, and provide the peasants of France with a first rate investment for the contents of their old stockings.

If the Pacifists, instead of alleging in the teeth of all experience that war produces no results except its own miseries and atrocities, were to remind pugnacious statesmen that wars hardly ever produce the results they were intended to produce, and often overthrow the order they were meant to consolidate, they could make a stronger case for themselves. Any fool can make a war if chance places him in command of the army, just as any fool can open the door of a tiger's cage if he happens to inherit the key. But to control it afterwards may be beyond the powers of Alexander, Caesar, Cromwell, Peter, Catherine, Washington, Lincoln and Napoleon all rolled into one.

Consider what the present war has done. Nicholas, aiming at a Pan-Slav empire, has been slaughtered, like a horse no longer worth his scanty food, by jailers so obscure that their names are unknown. The Kaiser, aiming at the destruction of the military prestige of the only Republic in Europe which seriously challenged the efficiency and respectability of the Hohenzollern tradition in government, has plunged all Europe to the east of him into the crudest regicidal Anarchism; brought the great North American Republic, raging and multitudinous, on his other flank, avowedly to tear him from his throne; and is fighting desperately to avoid surrendering Alsace-

Lorraine to a France whose military reputation has revived to a point approaching that boasted of by the Napoleonic glory merchants of 1812. Mr. Asquith and Viscount Grey, after vainly throwing Lord Haldane to the wolves, are down and out: their determination to exact a terrible price for the German devastation of Louvain ended in their own devastation of Dublin. France is wishing that she had allied herself with the devil rather than with the Tsar, and had kept her capital at home to mend her own slums instead of exporting it to Petrograd. America thought she would look on and make money; but Destiny has taken her by the throat and flung her into the war almost before the end of the presidential election in which she voted for the man who had kept her out of it so skilfully. Plenty of food here, is there not, for that derision which is Dublin's staple intellectual commodity, and which more or less infects all urban Ireland, to the great detriment of our national character, and the mean satisfaction of everything that is envious, conceited, and ignoble in our souls.

What we Irish have to consider, then, is not what the kings and their councillors and their warriors intended this war to be, but what, in the hands of that inexorable Power of whom it used to be said that "Man proposes: God disposes," it has now actually

become over and above its merely horrible aspect as an insane killing match. If there is anything at stake except military prestige, and the resulting Overbalance of Power, what is it? I think we must reply that the war has become a phase of that great struggle towards equality as the sole effective guarantee of democracy and liberty which is being constantly waged against the delivery of human welfare into the custody and control of privileged persons and classes: in short, against robbery of the poor and idolatry of the rich.

Idolatry to me is something much more real than an abusive catchword of Irish Protestantism. The particular idol I want this war to knock over is a highly Protestant idol of the purest Dublin Castle brand. I do not spitefully deny that King William Hohenzollern has done his best to earn the worship he claims by a good deal of public-spirited hard work. When an Irish lady at the beginning of the war wrote a little book to shew what a horrible and unhappy place Cork would be if it were occupied by the German army, she had hardly written two chapters before she discovered that her Prussian villain was improving Cork out of all recognition in spite of her; and by the time she had reached the end of her book the villain had

become a hero. I have seen a good many German towns; and they compared very favorably with most Irish towns in such respects as depend on good government and high social organization. In Ireland itself, such towns as Lismore, under the despotism of the Duke of Devonshire, are more civilized and creditably kept than towns which belong to a miscellaneous lot of little landlords or freeholders. But there is no permanence in the prosperity which depends on the character of a single man carefully brought up in a false and artificial relation to his fellow men: in short, to an idolized man. Towns should belong neither to dukes nor freeholders, but to all the people who live and work in them, subject to the general interest of the whole nation in them. For towns and nations do not die; but good dukes die and may be succeeded by bad ones; and little freeholders are too poor to keep their back yards clean, much less make a city great. Accordingly, I object to the centre of Europe, with its hundred and sixty million people, being the feudal estate of the Hohenzollern and Hapsburg families, without any guarantee that the head of either family at any moment may not be a lunatic or a scoundrel or both: indeed with a strong guarantee that he can never come quite sane out of the monstrous isolation and idolization

which he has to undergo from his childhood.

These two principles, Idolatry and Democracy, were not at issue when the war began, because idolatry at its very vilest, represented by the Russian Tsardom, was the antagonist of the Kaiser, whose rule was almost democratic by comparison. As long as Nicholas could turn the scale, the professions of his Allies to represent Democracy were an insult to history and to contemporary fact. But now that the war has destroyed the Tsardom and given its place in the alliance to the great Federal Republic of North America, the situation is changed. Far from Republicanism being outnumbered and outpowered and outfinanced by its Imperial Allies, it is now the predominant partner in the Alliance. It has visibly saved the military situation for them. It will, if they are victorious through its aid, practically dictate the terms of peace; and President Wilson's oration at the tomb of Lincoln on the fourth of July last left no doubt that the American terms would not be favorable to those political institutions which England and Germany have inherited in common from Feudalism. Both America and France will be obliged, in defence of their constitutions, to insist on their victory as a victory of Republicanism over feudal Monarchy. In

that case, nothing but a very strong public opinion on the democratic side from English and Scottish labor, from the Irish nation, and from the Oversea Dominions, reinforced by Italian, German, and Austrian Social-Democracy and by Jugo-Slav and Czecho-Slovak nationalism, can defeat the inevitable tendency of the reactionary elements in the Peace Conference to combine against the popular elements, even if it means combination with enemy forces and opposition to Allied ones.

That Ireland can look idly on at such a situation whilst Americans, Canadians, Australians and South Africans are fighting as furiously as Jugo-Slavs, Czecho-Slovaks, and Poles, is not to be excused by mere soreheadedness over our relations with England. What, for instance, has Irish Labor: that is, four-fifths of the Irish people, to say to the American Federation of Labor's manifesto as to the aims of the American working class in supporting the Allies? If Dublin Castle were wise, it would circulate that manifesto throughout the length and breadth of Ireland. But as the Castle is itself a typical example of the sort of political institution that American Labor is out to destroy, it is much more likely to suppress it forcibly. American Labor, however, will not take ignorance as an excuse for our not answering. President Wilson may be open to the retort

from Sinn Féin that the Feudalism he represents: the Feudalism of the beef baron and the newspaper millionaire and the steel, coal, railway, and oil trusts, in which Mr. Rockefeller can do things to Colorado that Reginald Front de Boeuf dared not have done to Nottingham for fear of Robin Hood, is worse than the Junker Feudalism of Prussia; but that retort does not touch Mr. Gompers. American Labor, knowing more about American Capitalism than Sinn Féin does or ever will, nevertheless thinks it worth its while to throw itself into this war on the side of the Allies as fiercely as British Labor, though it is traditionally anti-English and pro-Irish more unitedly than Irish Labor itself. It is not asking Irish Labor to help England: it is asking it to help Labor all over the world, and not sulk because Ireland has wrongs and grudges of her own to nurse.

This challenge from America, in which Labor accepts all the conditions of President Wilson, and adds to them a long list of demands which make any equivocation as to the thoroughgoing democracy of its spirit and aims impossible, proves that the war is now conceived by the Western peoples to whom we belong as a war of advancing world-Republicanism against Hohenzollernism fighting in its last ditch. The spirit of every nation will be judged

according to the side it takes in it. It is useless for us to sneer at such a conception on the ground that the cleavage between the belligerents is not completely consistent: clean cleavages of that kind do not occur in the affairs of nations. Neither the Mikado of Japan nor the King of Italy, not to mention the Balkan kinglets, are at issue with the Kaiser as to Democracy. But it is none the less clear that the defeat of the Central Empires will be a discredit from which the social order they represent, typified in Ireland by Dublin Castle, can hardly recover; whilst the defeat of the United States and their Allies would practically convince Europe that efficiency and safety can be secured only by idolatrous Imperialism. That ought to settle the question for any Irishman who really stands for liberty.

So far it is plain that the Irish side is for once the side on which the English find themselves; and the English generals naturally want Irish soldiers because, though they do not like them, and resent the detachment and frank derision with which they regard British moral pretensions in respect of nationalities struggling to be free and so forth, they know their value as soldiers and are anxious to have an Irish element in every battalion. Why does the Irishman hold back?

Not, clearly; that he is more afraid of being

killed than other people : he is actually sought for because he raises the standard of military courage in the field under the spur of his insurgent national pride, as the Irish casualties shew. Not, either, in any number of cases worth reckoning because he wants Germany to win with a view to the German terms of peace including the establishment of Ireland as an independent nation, like Belgium or Greece, under the guarantee of the victorious Central Empires. This was Roger Casement's plan ; but it is too technical politically for anyone but a professional diplomatist like Casement to understand ; and the ruthless exposure by the war of the utter dependence of Belgium and Greece on their ruthless guarantors, and the uselessness of the "scraps of paper" which guaranteed them, ought by this time to have set every intelligent Irishman implacably against such skull-grinning Independence as that.

The common Irishman takes a simpler view. He regards England as Ireland's enemy ; and his conclusion is that England's enemies are his friends. This is natural logic ; but it is bad logic. The Chinese pirate is the Englishman's enemy ; but if the Irishman were on that account to depend on the friendship of the Chinese pirate, or even to refrain from very strenuously helping the Englishman to hang him, he would probably have his throat

cut for his sulkiness. The Englishman and the Frenchman fight with what help they can get : Japanese, Negro, Red Indian, Pathan, Senegalese, (none of them bosom friends of white men, to say the least) are good enough for them when they have a common foe to overcome. An Irishman who will not fight for his side in the world conflict because the English are fighting on that side too has no political sense ; and an Ireland composed of such men could never be free, even if the gates of freedom were open wide before her. It is a case not of refusing to help the English in a bad cause, but of refusing to take advantage of the help of the English in a good one.

Then there is the more intelligent Irishman who hopes that the war may end in the establishment of a League of Nations, and that this League may take up the Irish question and insist on Ireland having its place as a nation, and not remaining a conquered territory governed by her conqueror. America, he thinks, may have a good deal to say in the matter on behalf of Ireland. She may have more if Ireland takes a generous share in the war. But we must not deceive ourselves as to the interest the rest of the world takes in our little island and our little people. Those of us who talk and think as if, outside England, all the great federations, empires, and nations

of the world were enthusiastic branches of the Gaelic League, or that they will put Irish interests before their own lightest advantage in the settlement after the war, or that they care twopence more for Ireland than they do for Poland, Finland, Bohemia, Armenia, or any of the Jugo-Slav conquests of Austria, are deceiving themselves very ridiculously. The truth is that these great European and Asiatic Powers will be hardly conscious of Ireland when the settlement comes. We are too far out of their way. We shall count for less with them in the treaty than Cyprus did in the Treaty of Berlin. We can make England feel us; and America is well aware of us; but we cannot make Europe feel us. The beginning of diplomatic wisdom with us is to realize our own insignificance outside the group of islands to which we belong.

But if we have no diplomatic importance, our sentimental importance in America and the Overseas Dominions, and our political importance within the British Islands, is considerable: it is, in fact, out of all proportion to our merits. And if Sinn Féin is to mean anything but organized national selfishness and insularity, it must take serious count of English and American sympathy. If I say that the Irish people are under very strong obligations to the English people, obligations

which it would be the grossest ingratitude to deny or forget, I shall no doubt astonish those bookmade Irish patriots who are too busy reading about the Treaty of Limerick and the feats of Brian Boru to see anything that happens under their noses. But at least they must be dimly conscious that there was an attempt made in Dublin in the Easter of 1916 to establish an independent Irish Republic, and that one of its leaders was a noted Socialist Trade Unionist named James Connolly who, being captured by the British troops, was denied the right of a prisoner of war, and shot. Now Connolly owed his position and influence as an Irish National leader to the part he had taken in organizing the great strike of the transport workers in Dublin in 1913; and the remains of his organization was the nucleus of the little army of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. That strike was sustained for many months after it would have exhausted the resources of the Irish workers had they not been aided from abroad. Where did the aid come from? From the reckless generosity of the English unions. The English workers fed, out of their own scanty wages, the Irish strikers and their families for months. I myself, with Connolly and Mr. George Russell, was among the speakers at a huge meeting got up in aid of the strike by Mr.

James Larkin in London. It was a genuine non-party meeting called by English workers and crowded by thousands of English people, who rallied to the Irish strike with unbounded enthusiasm and with as much money as they could afford, and indeed more than they would have thrown away on that doomed struggle if their heads had been as clear as their sympathies were warm. Connolly got the money by the plea that the cause of Labor was the same cause all the world over, and that as against the idler and the profiteer England and Ireland were "members one of another." We did not set up the cry of Sinn Féin then. We did not say "WE OURSELVES are sufficient to ourselves: you can keep your English money and leave us to take care of ourselves." We took the money and were glad to get it and spend it. We cannot now with any decency forget Connolly and change the subject to Cromwell and General Maxwell. I have the right to remind the Irish people of this, because I was one of those who asked for the money; and I was cheered to the echo by Englishmen and Englishwomen for doing so. I am an Irishman; and I have not forgotten. English working-class mothers have the right to say to me: "Our sons are in the trenches, fighting for their lives and liberties and for yours; and some of your sons who took our

money when they were starving are leaving them to fight alone." Not a very heroic position, that, for an Irish movement which is always talking heroics.

Naturally, General Maxwell and the Unionists of the War Office, with the British and Irish Junker class generally, take particularly good care not to remind the Irish people of this obligation. They can hardly hold up Connolly as a hero after shooting him, or claim the payment of debts due to him as debts of honor. They dread that sinking of national differences in the common cause of Labor all over the world far more than they dread a German victory. They will tell you to remember Belgium, to remember Poland, to remember Servia, to remember any place that is far enough off to have no obvious bearing on the relations between you and them; but they will not tell you to remember Dublin and Connolly. And yet it is only through Connolly and the international solidarity that Connolly stood for that the Irish worker can be made to feel that his cause and that of the English worker is a common cause, and that he is in debt to English Labor through a very recent and very big transaction. And the worst of it is that the Nationalists and Sinn Féiners are as guilty of this ungrateful suppression as their Unionist opponents, and as blind to the fact that the

Irish workers by themselves are negligible, though in combination with European and American Labor they are part of the only force that can finally make an end of all the empires and turn them into commonwealths of free nations.

Let me turn now from the broad unselfish view to the narrow and interested one; for it is useless to pretend that lads brought up as so many of ours have been, drudging for mean wages on small farms in petty parishes, can be expected to reason like statesmen or to feel obliged to repay benefits that came directly only to workers in cities they never set foot in. To them you must say that horrible as this war is, it has raised millions of men and their families from a condition not far above savagery to comparative civilization. A trench is a safer place than a Dublin slum; and the men in it are well fed, well clothed, and certain that, whatever the Germans may do to them, at least their own commanders are keenly interested in the preservation of their lives and the maintenance of their health and strength, which is more than can be said of their employers at home. Their wives get a separation allowance; and the children are considered and allowed for too. The huge sums of money that this costs are taken largely from the incomes of rich landlords and capitalists who

have to give up one pound out of every three they possess to feed, clothe, and equip the soldier, and keep his wife at home. The wonder is that any man chooses to live in a slum or drudge as a laborer on a farm when he can get into the army. But at least, some of them will say, you do not get blown to bits by high-explosive shells in a slum. Unfortunately, you do. Bombs are raining on civilian slums, farmhouses, and cottages every day in this war; and the rain gets heavier from week to week. If the slums of Ireland have escaped so far, it is only because the slums of England are nearer to the German lines; and the day is not far distant when, if the war goes on, the soldier in his bomb-proof dug-out will be safer from shells than the slum dweller in his wretched room. The aeroplane and the torpedo are making short work of the safety of the civilian in war.

Then take the case of the lad on the farm. He knows nothing of the world: his only taste of adventure is pretending to be a soldier by doing a little precarious illegal drilling which teaches him nothing of real modern warfare, though it may easily tempt him to throw away his life in a hopeless rising of men fed on dreams against men armed with tanks and aeroplanes. His wages would be spat at by a dock laborer in a British port; and the farmer keeps them

down by employing his own sons as laborers for a few shillings pocket money. He is under everyone's thumb ; yet he is afraid of military discipline, which, severe as it is, yet has limits beyond which the soldier is reasonably free, and even unreasonably free, whereas a laborer is never free at all. The laborer is never sure of his food from week to week ; but in military service he never has to think about this : food, lodging, and clothing are provided for him as certainly as they are for a general, in return for a round of duties which, though the slightest neglect or slackness in performing them is fiercely punished, are, taking one year with another, neither as heavy nor as wearing as the never ending jobs of an agricultural laborer. In many branches of the service, such as the air force and artillery, there is valuable mechanical training to be had ; and even the physical training of the ordinary infantry soldier pulls the country lad together and smartens him up, besides forcing him to do things that must be done promptly and to make up his mind instead of mooning. Travelling and the sight of foreign countries and contact with foreign peoples, which form an essential and expensive part of the education of a gentleman, can be obtained by an Irish country lad in no other way than through military service. Now that the service is compulsory in England the soldier

finds himself in ordinary respectable company, often better than he has ever been in before. I am not playing the tricks of the recruiting sergeant and trying to persuade Irish lads that a soldier's life is all beer and skittles. If it has opportunities and advantages, it has also dangers and hardships which are inevitable ; and it has injustices and cruelties which are all the harder to bear as they are mostly stupid and mischievous relics of the days when soldiers were the dregs of the population. But if an Irish agricultural laborer compares the soldier's condition, not with a condition of ideal happiness and freedom, but with his own, he will think twice before missing such a chance as the war offers him of seeing a little more of the world than the half dozen fields and the village public house which now imprison him. When one considers what the daily life of four out of every five young Irishmen is, one wonders that more laborers do not jump at the chance the new army offers them.

At this I must leave it. Let me just sum up the case as it presents itself to me.

1. Though almost all the official arguments used at the beginning of the war to persuade Irishmen to join the army prove on candid examination to be claptraps, yet their exposure, tempting as it is to anti-British journalists and orators, does not affect the real case for recruiting. The Irishman still has

to decide his attitude towards the war exactly as any American, Frenchman, Italian, or Britisher has. If there are as good reasons for Ireland taking her share in the war as for Portugal, she cannot excuse herself for holding back by pleading that the recruiting authorities give her bad ones, or that Portugal is not held down as a conquered territory by Spain.

2. The Irish workers have no grievance against the English workers. There are actually more Home Rulers in England than in Ireland; and the organized workers of England have not only endorsed the Irish national cause as a matter of course, but have handsomely subsidized Irish Labor in its struggle for better conditions of life in Dublin. In both countries, as in all commercial countries to-day, there is a struggle between the propertied classes and the working classes; and for the workers of Ireland to quarrel with those of England in the interests of the Hohenzollern and Hapsburg dynasties would be as dangerous a mistake as a division between the English and French or the French and Italian workers, who have sunk all their national differences and traditional enmities in the common cause of Democracy.

You will notice that I have said no word about that conscientious objection to war as war which is nevertheless a powerful factor

in the situation. I myself, like that very typical Irishman the Duke of Wellington, have a conscientious objection to war so strong and deep that I do a most painful violence to my nature and conscience whenever I am compelled, as I am now, to accept war as a necessity of which we must make the best by acquitting ourselves like brave and astute warriors and statesmen rather than Christians. Nowhere is this conscientious objection to war more general and more deeply felt than in the army. If my own acquaintance with the men now actually fighting is at all typical, I must conclude that at least ninety-nine per cent. of the men agree with the conqueror of Napoleon that war is so dreadful a calamity that only half-witted men would engage in it, or countenance it, if any honorable alternative were possible. I can respect no Christian pope or priest who ceases during war to press the question "Sirs, ye are brothers: wherefore do ye wrong one to another?" I will even say that if we Irish were indeed a nation of saints, and had never drawn the sword in our own or in any other cause, nor glorified the Irish soldiers who have, on one side or the other, maintained our boasted military prestige from Fontenoy to Gallipoli, then we might claim the benefit of the Act, and say, "The Irish do not fight."

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As it is, I am afraid all Europe would laugh at such a plea. I therefore rule that consideration out, as one to which we can make no moral pretension.

What we *can* plead is that as, like the Americans, we did not make the war, and are free of the guilt of bringing such a calamity on mankind, and as we can take part in it only on what we conceive to be the side of political emancipation in spite of our intense preoccupation with our own acute national problem, we shall be acting with complete national disinterestedness in the spirit of men with a duty to the world as well as to ourselves. Unless Dublin Castle has hopelessly broken our spirits and limited our horizon, the Irish soldier will carry the burden which war throws on the conscience of every sane man all the more lightly because he will be able to say honestly, "At least we had nothing to gain by it that the whole world did not share; and we did not hesitate to risk our lives for the national liberty of men who had denied national liberty to us." The Irishmen who have been fighting since 1914 can already say this. Can the rest hope to be able to say anything more honorable to Ireland? Faithfully,

G. BERNARD SHAW.

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